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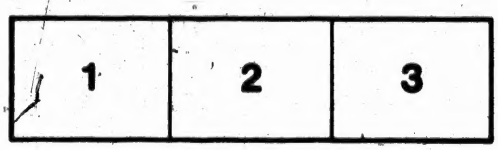

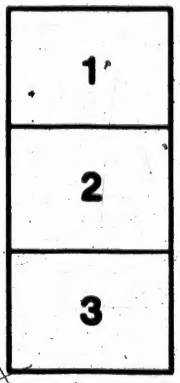

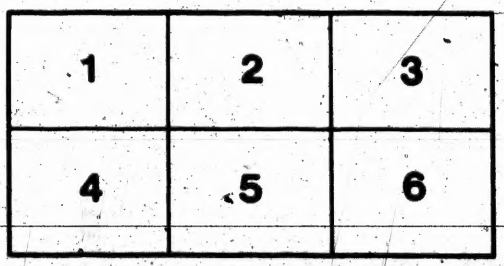

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Reminiscences of Toronto University

I.—THE CONVOCATION HALL.
II.—PROFESSOR GEORGE PAXTON YOUNG

LIBRARY

Reminiscences of Toronto University

I.—The Convocation Hall

Professor Archibald MacMechan, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.

UNDERGRADUATES at the University of Toronto have much to be thankful for, now-a-days. They are rich in buildings, equipment and courses we only dreamed of in the early eighties; and yet we men of an older generation need not greatly envy them. We had what they can never have, —old Convocation Hall and Young.

In my time, Convocation Hall was the heart of the university life. There we gathered in June for matriculation, and saw for the first time those other youths who were to be our comrades, rivals or mere acquaintances in the new life we were all beginning. Four years later, in another June, a sifted remnant of us knelt upon the dais, one by one, laid our joined hands between the lavender kids of the Chancellor, and swore to be his "men," as Hereward swore allegiance to the Conqueror, as Arthur's knights made oath to Arthur. Between those two Junes, there were many strange chapters written in each life history.

Ruskin tells us that his delight in the famous hall of Christ's church,—"The House," as its alumni proudly call it,—was taken away by the fact that weekly examinations were held in it; but I cannot regret that ours was put to like ignoble use. There is a reason even for examinations, and anyone who did not write his papers in Hall in the brave days of old has missed a great deal. The ritual even for a "Supplemental" was imposing. At the fated hour, we sat about the room, each victim at his own altar, that queer, little, solid, winged, squat, awkward, moveable desk, that was so hard to get between your legs, when suddenly we heard from the back of the room, the loud command, "Stand up, gentlemen!" and we stood to attention, while our stern-faced Bedel, a relic of Balaclava, marched in, with the mace before the gowned examiner (I wonder if there is a mace now-a-days,

and a procession.) Solemnly McKim laid the bauble on the high table; the papers were dealt out, we stood trembling until they came our way, then seized them and sank down.

Examiners, we thought, always looked as if they regretted more or less, the performance of their disagreeable duties. As Keats truly says of them,

> "Half ignorant, they turned an easy wheel,
> That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel."

Generally they had books to read and exhibited a supreme indifference to the woes of their unhappy fellow-mortals. We used to think that when our turn came to be examiners, we would show some signs of compassion, or try to make things easier, but the point of view shifts insensibly, with time. Sometimes a sad examinee sought the high seat to ask the throned examiner a futile question; sometimes a friend of the particular Torquemada visited the torture-chamber. Generally he was a recent graduate, spruce and trim enough to madden Hotspur, and he sauntered up the aisle with an air of convinced superiority to us, that made us long for his heart's blood. But barring such interruptions, it was scratch, scribble, scrawl, without drawing breath until the mortal two hours and a half were over and all candidates were ready to drop. We wrote on a special, thin, square, unruled paper which was lavishly dispensed. Surplus sheets were annexed by the evil-minded as a lawful perquisite. Our Gold Medallist in Philosophy was understood to hold a record of eighty-seven of these, on one "Honors" examination, fairly covered within the stated period. One examiner—long since gone to his account—was credited with weighing the merits of such papers, quite literally, in a pair of letter-scales; but this tale lacks official confirmation.

Though the Hall was associated in our minds chiefly with varieties of refined torture, it had pleasanter uses. And even torture may have its compensations. I imagine that when the levers slackened for a prisoner on the rack, the words of some old text engraven on his dungeon walls, the colours of the sunset seen through the barred loop-holes, would fasten themselves upon his mind for the very reason that every nerve was crying out in pain. Even in the intervals of despair between fits of bad writing known only to the non-mathematical struggling with co-sines and

tangents, some of us learned more important lessons from the Hall than we got in the class-room or the study.

It taught us first, the meaning of the builder's art. The great, airy, austere chamber was the most majestic room I have seen in America. The rugged outer wall of grey stone, the smooth and solid inner facings, the tall, clear casements at the sides, whereat green vine-leaves waved in summer, the high-pitched roof with its brown solidity and wealth of grotesque carving—there was one devil with twisted horns, that used to waggle his tongue at me, all through Second Year Mechanics,—the short pillars with every chapiter varied, and, more than all, the great painted window above the dais, with its brave, sad story—to learn the meaning of these things, apart and as a whole, was worth at least one place on the Honor List. After knowing only the lath-and-plaster makeshifts, the squalor of our pioneer tent-making, which we dare not call architecture, it was something to see, to stand in, to frequent daily a building that was really built, a fabric that could be swept by fire and not a stone fall. Convocation Hall supplied the necessary comment to "The Seven Lamps."

It taught us another lesson even more important,—the meaning of the word 'country.' Though dumb, it taught us to speak that word plain. There in the great painted window, confronting us every time we entered the Hall, for whatever purpose, were blazoned four names, which no Canadian, and certainly no Toronto man, can afford to forget,

"McKenzie, Mewburn, Tempest, McEachren."

One day in June, 1866, the Queen's Own swung through the streets of Toronto, with the traditional swagger of the rifle regiment, and in the ranks of the University company marched four young men, who, a few days later were brought back in their coffins. It was only a little border skirmish and our tiny force was mishandled by an auctioneer; but Ridgeway means a great deal to us. These Toronto undergraduates had not much to give, only the bare life, but they gave it freely in the holiest of causes, on the frontier of their native land. Let it be remembered that students of Toronto were the first to meet the bullets of the invading Fenian ruffians. This lesson of the great window was driven home by McCaul's proud full-voiced Latin:

"Qui—pro patria pugnantes, occubuerunt."—That was one bit of a dead language, which one more Moderns man brought away with him from the Varsity.

There were other reasons for feeling gratitude to the architect of Convocation Hall. In it some of us learned that the music of the acknowledged masters was not a thing to be dreaded, but "a kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that." To have heard the Sonata Appassionata, or the overture to Tannhauser for the first time in the great chamber is an event to be remembered. Then in the old days there was a girl violinist with dark eyes and hair who used to play the Carnival of Venice at Conversazione concerts. Her music begat verses to her; but Toronto men are not so sentimental now-a-days.

Here too, through the wisdom of our Fellow of Merton, we learned the meaning of the lines about "gorgeous tragedy with sceptred pall." The Antigone cost not a little to produce, in time, and money and mental wear and tear; but it was worth the outlay ten times over. It was something that the Glee Club abandoned "Alouette" and the "Carmen Ad Initiandos Tirones" for "Megaloi de logoi, megalas plegas." The lights, the color, the shifting statuesque groups, the masses of the chorus, "the music of an antique tongue" blended with the music of Mendelssohn made one Greek play at least for ever comprehensible to us.

Convocation Hall saw besides our little triumphs of the hour, heard our spoutings and debatings. In what arena since has success brought a finer glow or tasted sweeter?

II.—Professor George Paxton Young

WITH much unfeigned reluctance I must confess that the occasion of my first view of Professor Young was a "supplemental" examination, for I was one of those unwise persons who took three years at Toronto, when I might have taken four, and suffered in consequence. With the Freshman's imperfect sense of proportion, I had just taken the seat of a fellow-sinner in a higher year, and had my error pointed out to me with dignity but decision, when an old gentleman marched up the aisle, mounted the dais and faced us to make some unim-

portant announcement. He was an old gentleman with a bald head, a white beard and a rasping voice; and I wondered with all the wonder of a Freshman why the others cheered. My dignified senior told me that it was "Young;" but the name meant nothing to me. Later I was one of those who cheered the casual mention of his name on a programme, much more his bodily presence.

There is no weather now so fine, as when the term began in those old days. October mornings were always bright and kindly with a touch of frost in the air to hint of the coming winter. The sunshine was inside the building, as well as out, and gilded all the courses. One of the first make-weights I had to shoulder, in addition to my 'Honors' course was Young's lectures in Metaphysics; and I entered the class unthinkingly. Such was the good pleasure of the authorities, the decree of the curriculum; and it was not mine to reason why,—a remark which needs explanation.

When Toronto men of the early eighties call that time Toronto's Age of Gold, they are thinking chiefly of certain hearts of gold, which every test of time only proves true metal. But it is just possible that the dons of that day did not hold precisely this opinion. We were undoubtedly a licentious crew. The accepted theory of university life was "to enlarge your mind and play football;" and some men did both with marked success. We certainly never wanted energy. The men of the notorious "sore head department" found the university instruction deficient and organized the mother of all the clubs to make good that deficiency. We hunted out German families in the city to board with, to improve our German; we spent our vacations in Quebec, to improve our French; we taught peanut vendors in the Italian Sunday School, to improve our Italian. We worried the authorities into bettering the courses. We cultivated literature and published an anthology of our own immortal writings; we astonished the world with a new Protestantism. One oddity diverged from the regular prescriptions into heraldry and Russian. Our Shelley spent a winter in Paris, where he consorted with the people called Anarchists, and returned a missionary of the gospel of Henry George. We went to England as cattle-men, that we might stand in the Abbey in the Poet's Corner and see with our own eyes those sacred places which had belonged to the geography of

Fairyland. We read Sartor for the Shunine 'pieces'; we despised 'gig-men'; our greatest oath was by Saint Thomas of Carlyle. Above all we put in practice a rude elective system of our own, quite distinct from that contemplated by the university regulations. If lectures were, in our mature judgment, not good, we refrained from attending them; or, if the tradition ran, that a particular course was forty years old, or thereabouts, as the frayed and yellowing manuscript attested, we strove to lure the lecturer from the well-beaten highway into delightful by-paths of anecdote and reminiscence. If lectures were good, we attended even Pass lectures; and that was the reason Young's room was always crowded.

His was the first room in the eastern corridor. Twice a week it was filled at ten o'clock with a noisy throng, sitting on the hard benches, chatting or looking out upon the lawn through the narrow diamond-paned windows. On the stroke of the hour, there enters hastily an old gentleman in black, with his gown slipping off his shoulders, and his mortar-board in his hand, full of manuscript. Without noticing the applause which always greets his entrance,—for in Canada we have this hearty Scottish custom which so shocks the decorous American visitor in Edinburgh class-rooms,—he swiftly divests himself of his gown, which he bundles up on the top of the high, spindling reading-desk, scrawled all over with "Hence accordingly." Swiftly he takes the notes from the trencher, which he plumps down on top of the gown, wheels round to the blackboard and dashes off an outline of the coming lecture. Each head of the discourse is marked with the quaint device of a little bob-tailed arrow flying straight at it. I did not understand the symbolism then; nor, I believe, did Young himself. Those arrows signified that these were winged words, as goads fastened by the masters of assemblies.

In a minute or two, the outline is written, and the professor turns to the class with a smile.

Let us take a good look at him; for we shall never see his like again. He was a survival of an extinct race of giants, the Edinburgh metaphysicians; and he brought into the class-room all the dignity of the old school. He always appeared in his "blacks," flapped trousers of a pattern worn early in the century, and an old-fashioned claw-hammer coat, always looking new and carefully brushed. His linen, too, was always im-

maculate, and, in token of the profession he had abandoned, he sported a clerical tie. In figure he was of middle size, neither short nor tall, markedly sturdy, in spite of a slight stoop. At first sight his face was not inspiring. He had a bald head, a thick nose, a port-wine complexion and the fine, clear white hair and beard which go with it. The brows formed a heavy ridge, 'the bar of Michael Angelo,' from which the rest of the skull retreated; the forehead seemed low; but all that was best of him looked out of his bright eyes. He had a trick of shutting them tight, and shading them with his left hand, while he motioned with his right, as he said,

"When I think of a centaurr, I see a centaurr with the horrse's body as here (gesture) and the man's body as here (gesture). And when I think of Socrates I see Socrates with his bald head,—and his snub nose—and his luminous eyes."

Then we held our breath, for it was plain to the meanest understanding that Young did behold a veritable 'centaurr,' trotting along in an ideal world; and as for 'Socrates,'—well, some of us had read Waring and puzzled over the meaning of the last word.

Young always stood at lecture. We should have felt it to be a violation of the order of nature, to see him sit down. Indeed there was hardly room for him to do so, penned in as he was between the blackboard and the regiment of long desks, which filled the room. He stood, not on a platform above us, but on a level with us. Perhaps there was a meaning in this too. The imagination cannot picture him lolling in a comfortable catheder and dictating an interminable 'literature' of his subject. As he begins to speak, his voice is harsh, and thin; the Scotch burr grates intolerably. But soon it gathers richness and depth and power; Young is warming to his work, and your only fear is that he [illegible] stop. The lecture was not an oration, but a [illegible] of clear and rapid exposition, following the outline on the board. It is punctuated by rounds of hearty Kentish fire, as each point is made. Young understands and waits with a smile for it to cease, before he goes on again. He generally ends in a climax, as on that day, when he read, in illustration of some statement, ten or a dozen lines from Elaine, closing the book with a sweeping bow and a comprehensive smile, at the words,

"And so she lived in phantasy."

Young was old-fashioned in his illustrations. Chief of these were the watch and the orange and the round red disk, he talked so much about but never produced. They had only an ideal existence. I have, however, a portrait of that red disk, labelled to prevent mistakes, and I believe it to be a good likeness. This simple object "involved

(a) A sensation of Redness,

(b) A manifold of Sensations under relations of Extension."

Above all, there was the famous ribbon, "blue at one end and red at the other," of which Irwin made such capital and kindly fun in the Varsity Book. We knew them all as old friends and felt the lecture to be rather incomplete at which none of them put in an appearance.

His manner in the class-room was fascinating—no weaker word will do. He had a way of beaming on a roomful of young men, as if each and every one was his particular friend. His Honor men he cultivated; but undistinguished Pass men like the present writer he did not know from Adam. Toronto traditions do not favor the growth of personal relations between teachers and taught. No member of our class will, I fancy, dispute my claim to being the worst metaphysician in it. I remember writing down one of Young's citations from one of the old Grecians:

"Hidden harmony is better than apparent." I, however, wrote it thus "Hidden harmony is better than a parent," and puzzled over it a long time, as well I might. The saying was no doubt deep and wise, for it was Greek, and Young had quoted it with approval, but I felt that now I was really getting beyond my depth. The only time Young quizzed me in class, I failed, and he snubbed me, contrary to his custom, in a way I did not wholly deserve. It was a rude awakening, for up to that time I had cherished the delusion that I stood specially well with him, and I believe every man in the class had much the same notion in regard to himself. His portrait shows him grave, but as I call up his face, it is always shining with the inward glow of thought and kindliness. Only once was he stern with us, when he thought that, in the excitement of a Literary Society election, we had tried to discredit a Roman Catholic candidate on account of his religion. We had not done so in fact, but we took the rebuke to heart. We

"had such reverence for his blame."

No course in Metaphysics is complete without a consideration of the child's mind. The modern psychologist observes his own infants and makes a book of the results, a course of action barred to Young, for he was an old bachelor. The college legend ran that the lady he was to marry perished in the Desjardins Bridge accident. Still his treatment of this part of his subject could not be considered unsatisfactory. His references to the young things had more than a little of Elia's tenderness and humor, as in Dream Children, that vision of the circle round the red hearth-fire, that haunts the childless man. Some of us expected to teach, and Young used to counsel us not to be too hard on the bairns, not to trouble if they were restless in school and fidgeted on their benches. "Children wake up in the morning and their nerve centres are lauded with energy," he would say; and this piece of advice saved one teacher at least from many a mistake. The baby, he pretended, was at first a very unattractive, unmoral little animal.

"Gentlemen"—and there was education in the way Young said "Gentlemen"—"you will sometimes see a crrowd of ladies about a little infant, and they are saying, 'Oh, the dearr little thing! Oh, the sweet little thing!' Gentlemen, I tell you," here his eyes twinkled and his whole face beamed like a sun, as he added with comic vehemence, "a baaby is, 'a wretch concentered all on self.'"

Young lecture was more than a lecture. As a mere expositor, simply as a teacher of his subject, able to arouse interest and hold attention, I never heard his equal. The hour we spent in his class-room never seemed long. If a student was ever bored or tired I cannot tell, for I never saw or heard anything but Young from first to last. To say that he was all alive with interest in his subject and in his students is to understate the fact. At each lecture he seemed to feel that from all eternity he had but this one brief hour to drive home upon the minds of this one set of men, this one set of truths; and he made the most of it. How familiar is the phrase: "And I shall think the hour well spent, gentlemen, if I succeed in making this one point clear to you." He never condescended to class-room tricks, on the freakishness of a carefully cultivated eccentricity; he never attempted to raise a laugh, but there was a good deal of laughing in his

class. Sometimes it was the laugh of intellectual superiority as Mill, Reid, Hamilton and Co., were battered about, and we learned that it was paying something or other too high a compliment to call it wrong, it was nonsense. And the last word came out like a bullet from a gun. Sometimes the laugh had a less profound cause, for Young's humor bubbled up irrepressibly from the inner depths of the man and his interest in his subject; and he simply shared it with us, along with all that was best in his nature.

I have never heard his equal. I have sat in the Seminar of Johns Hopkins' great Grecian, with men from Maine and California, from Toronto and Baton Rouge, and marvelled at the union of culture and character, the blending of brilliancy and learning, the perfect reconciliation of the exact scholarship we associate with Germany and the grace and wit we associate with Oxford, in the Head of the Department. I know the reverence of Harvard men for their Professor Emeritus of Fine Art, the friend of Ruskin and Carlyle, of all just men, of all good causes. I have heard him lecture to a class of five hundred in "old Massachusetts", at nine of a rainy morning. Behind every sentence of his mellow English, I saw years of special knowledge, special insight, a life-time of exquisite culture. Both lecturers opened the doors to new worlds of wonder. But Young's gift was something different and apart. He took hold of us; he awoke us to life, the life of the mind. His teaching was in effect, if not in method, more like what we learn of the teaching of Socrates, than anything I can imagine, of a modern Socrates a lover of wisdom, reinforced by the perfervid energy of the Scot. Those who knew him and loved him, who recognize how much they owe to his teaching, feel that Young is worthy to take rank in that sacred band, so well praised by another grateful scholar.

"For rigorous teachers seized my youth,
And purged its faith and trimm'd its fire,
Showed me the high white star of truth,
There bade me gaze and there aspire."

What did Young teach us? Not trusting to memory alone, I hunted out an old note-book, to find the answer. It is not a very creditable production. There are disordered pencillings of various courses, which should have been neatly copied into another book and

were not, bits of English and German biography, drawings of shells, Chapman's scale of hardness, alongside a recognizable portrait of the professor and his skull-cap, quotations and extracts from various sources, which would not be of the slightest use in examinations; but the greatest part is taken up with Young's lectures. The notes are not very good notes. How could any one take notes while Young was lecturing? Mine were seldom more than the outlines from the back-board, decorated freely with the famous bob-tailed arrows. The course was evidently the traditional Philosophy-Logic course of the old curriculum, for Young knew not the New Psychology with its laboratories and experiments. Though I must have passed his examinations (for the charity of examiners is boundless), I am not and never could be a metaphysician. For the life of me, I cannot tell what sentence of the "Kritik" it was, which Young so often assured us "should be written in letters of gold." Even now an article of Caird's on Reality, or a conversation on philosophy makes my head swim. But I would not exchange Young's course in metaphysics for all the others I took at Toronto. Metaphysics was but a small part of that course. Young was a born teacher. That he taught us philosophical truths of the last importance, was still a slighter thing than teaching us to think and teaching us to live.

The problem of the external world! Had any of us the faintest notion that there was such a problem, before our Chrysostom opened his lips of gold? This was a common Canadian sort of universe, which we all understood well enough for all practical purposes. Then came the awakening, the veil was taken from our eyes. This solid-seeming world was but the shadow of our dream, if indeed it had being at all, apart from ourselves. Everything we saw and touched, and heard and felt, the most humdrum effect of our activity, the commonest motion of foot or hand, were all parts of one unending miracle.

Turning our eyes inward upon ourselves as Cassius wished that Brutus could, we found there also a new strange world. "The abysmal depths of personality!" There was then a world within us, wherein this marvellous outer world to the remotest point of light in the heavens is embraced, comprehended, set in order. The procession of Appearances took on a pleasing strangeness and the horizon of those blue October

mornings on the Lawn widened to Immensity. It was the time of fresh enthusiasm of loyal friendships, of young love, and this new teaching came to give them all a new value, a new meaning, a new force.

Young began as a Scottish minister, but he found his true work as a teacher in the University. Inevitably something of the minister clung to him, a suggestion in the drama, a hint of the pulpit in his peroration, but best of all the true prophet's moral earnestness. He was a preacher of righteousness. His course was not a mere exercise of ingenuity, a necessary part of the curriculum, a prescribed exercise for a degree. As he taught, he saw before him, human souls needing light, needing guidance; the fault was his if he showed no light, or light that led astray. He came to his work as the potter to the raw clay, from which he knows may be fashioned vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. What blame too heavy for the workman, if from slackness on his part, the work leave the shaping hand, flawed or weak or bent awry! Though a preacher, he was no partizan of a narrow unlovely orthodoxy. To youths of every shade of belief, from all parts of Puritan Canada, to Protestant and Catholic, to those who wished to live so that they could look their mothers in the face, to those who were using their first freedom to take their first lessons in vice, Young preached the great doctrines by which the pillars of the world stand firm. He leant chiefly towards those that insist on the dignity of man and the worth of the human soul,

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control."

We all heard him, for he spoke plain, and if we did not heed, the fault was ours, not his. Life only approves his wisdom. In difficulty after difficulty, in crisis after crisis, how often have his old students found some winged word of Young's rising to comfort or to rebuke!

And now,—he is gone. He wrote nothing, his chief memorial is builded in the hearts of those he taught. New Toronto men leave the college walls by hundreds, graduates in good standing, to whom his great tradition, his great language mean nothing. It is a pity. Convocation Hall is gone too, like the old, wise master, like the snows of last year. The new order is no doubt better, but the old interior, the precious carvings, the broad stair in the library turret with the

lattice window, that opened towards the sun-rising, have perished irrevocably. No wonder the Great Fire killed our old President!

Young worked until within a few days of his death. He was numbered with the fortunate ones who die in harness. His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And it was fitting that he should make a final progress from Convocation Hall in all the pomp of the eternal silence. I wish I could have stood on the dais, under the memorial window, beside the coffin on which lay the old college cap, like the soldier's helmet on the soldier's bier. I wish I could have joined in the hymns raised by those who were buckling on the armor of life over all that was mortal of him who had laid it down. I wish I could have heard the prayer of Rev. D. J. Macdonnell, the deep-hearted pastor of St. Andrew's, and the words he spoke of the best, and wisest and humblest of his parishioners. I wish I could have looked once more upon that honored head before the clods covered it; and have followed my old master to his last resting-place. I could not for I was far away. I can only lay this belated token of my gratitude upon his grave.

* * * * * *

"Forgive the feeble script that does thee wrong!"